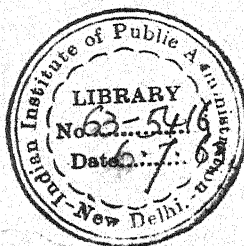


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**CIVIL SERVANTS AND
DEMOCRACY**

BY

B. L. CHAK



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**The U. P. Regional Branch
of
The Indian Institute of Public Administration
Lucknow**

U. P. Regional Branch
of
The Indian Institute of Public Administration
Civil Secretariat
Lucknow

K12000

12000

Price Rs. 1.50

Printed in India
by E. B. Dearmun, at the Lucknow Publishing House, Lucknow

Sri B. L. Chak is a Member of the Indian Administrative Service and has held various assignments in Uttar Pradesh as a District Officer, as a Head of a Department and in various branches of the Secretariat. He has had occasion and opportunity of seeing the wheels of administration move at close quarters and he has drawn freely on his experiences and impressions.

The present collection gives an intimate picture of some of the factors which affect the administration at various levels. The articles are eminently readable and I hope they will be liked by a wide circle of readers.

M. ZAHEER
Honorary Secretary
U. P. Regional Branch of the
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Lucknow

Preface

Some of the articles included in this booklet have already been printed elsewhere. Others are appearing for the first time. Here there is no attempt to put up a learned treatise, based on elaborate analysis or research. On the contrary, an attempt has been made to record impressions, in a homely way, more or less as they have occurred, so that the world of the civil servant is brought closer to the man in the street. I do not know how far this purpose has been fulfilled, but the reader can at least have the satisfaction that the size of the publication protects him from having to suffer it at length.

In the end I would like to convey my thanks to Sri Mohd. Zaheer and to the Regional Branch of the Indian Institute of Public Administration for arranging for the publication of this booklet.

Lucknow

B. L. CHAK

January 7, 1963

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On Civil Servants

A civil servant is often pictured as a dry as dust bureaucrat and is a frequent subject of caricature. There is a story of a Treasury Officer who had to pass certain pension papers which ran into two consecutive years. The papers for the latter year were found complete in all respects and the pension was allowed. For the earlier year a technical objection was raised. The claim was inadmissible as the life certificate for the earlier year had not been filled.

That may be an extreme case. But it focuses attention on the pivotal rôle that rules play in the life of a civil servant. His approach to problems has basically to be impersonal and therefore there is no room for the grass-root approach, and for the hundred and one small intimacies that arise when people live in a familiar neighbourhood and which constitute life's great attraction. When a civil servant embarks on an official career, he must turn his back on the house where he was born, the school which shaped his earlier years and the neighbourhood where he grew up and played; and throughout his official career, he has to see that his angularities do not protrude and that reason is not subordinated to emotion. If at times, he appears to be lacking in spirit and strength of feeling, it is because the structure, of which he is a part, demands that it should be so. Discipline always demands a certain amount of sacrifice and rigidity often goes side by side with firmness.

China introduced written tests

The need for a well-integrated service has been felt at all periods of history and it was probably China that first devised a series of written tests on the basis of which recruitment was to take place. They also devised the system of transfers and interchangeability of posts. Rome also devised a kind of civil service, where promotion was on the basis of performance and officers moved from charge to charge in the far-flung Roman empire, according to the needs and exigencies of the situation.

Granted that a civil service is necessary, how should it be recruited. At one time, it was on the basis of nomination and patronage. This denied equality of opportunity and stood in the way of recruitment of talent from different strata, thus raising a monolithic structure, which was not broadbased. Competitive examinations remedied this position, though in some quarters the value of written tests has been questioned. But after all there has got to be a basis on which selections are made. It is possible that at these selections, reasonably good people who do not fare well at the tests may be left out but the system does ensure that persons who are selected touch a certain allround level. The position has further been remedied by providing for promotion to the upper rungs of the ladder at various stages and almost invariably in all service rules, a certain percentage of vacancies are set apart as

promotion quota. This not only acts as an incentive to good performance, but also to some extent knocks off the class bias of any service, breaking its artificial barriers and letting in a breath of fresh air.

An ordered hierarchy

Once selected, a civil servant takes his place in an ordered hierarchy where transfers, promotions, age of superannuation, are all fixed in accordance with a well-known pattern. This gives stability, order and security. Apart from this, a civil servant unlike the entrant to other professions is spared the initial years of grind, waiting and uncertainty. From the first day, when he takes over, he counts for something and this is a distinct point of advantage.

The above is unlike other professions, for example, law, where 8 to 10 years preliminary waiting is quite a normal feature, but here the parallel ends. A man in business or a profession carries on for a much longer period and his peak earnings cover a larger number of years, which more than compensates for the earlier unsatisfactory start.

Then again there is the problem of the rising spiral of prices, which the civil servant has to face as a fixed salaried worker. At the time, when prices were low this was a point of advantage, but now the odds are against him. This shift in emphasis is inevitable, when there is a changeover from a static economy where scope for production of wealth is limited to an expanding industrial economy, which results in more wealth and more jobs. Business and professions have opened up fresh pastures for the youth of the country and this has naturally hit the fixed salaried worker unfavourably. The desire to assist is there, but relief is not so easy because Government being the largest single employer is precluded from adopting piecemeal measures to meet the problem. What concessions are given at one place have to be extended at another, and this means a sizable hole in government's pockets every time facilities are enlarged or service conditions changed, which more often than not, it can ill afford in the background of expanding expenditure and commitments.

A running ladder

A steel structure, as is obvious, has to be pre-planned and the civil service structure can obviously be no exception to this. There is a time for entry into service, and a time for retirement. The latter aspect is an important feature of this structure and this enables a regular intake every year, thus forming a kind of a running ladder, giving the service a continuity; precluding too much recruitment or retirement at any point of time, and this ensures that work is not dislocated. It also enables Government to pick out every year from fresh batches turned out by our universities in ever increasing number. The problem of retirement is an old one and wise men have given thought to it, ever since the idea of "vanprasta" was evolved in this country, and by and large it has to be admitted that the solution devised by the services is certainly one which other units, not so favourably placed, may very well envy. Civil service believes that

there is a time to be recruited, a time to work and a time to retire and in following this pattern a civil servant is able to give his best and Government also able to secure good value for its money.

While talking of costs any system has to be taken as a complete whole. Thus cost not only includes pay, pension, provident fund, etc. but also cost of recruitment. This long-term deal for employment, which Government alone is in a position to plan on a huge scale, cannot be considered as an unsatisfactory arrangement.

There is another aspect of the matter which calls for comments. As is well known, there are various categories of Government servants, and probably more than are really necessary. They have naturally different rôles though they have a common end. But what is really wasteful is where a category recruited for one class of work is made to do work which can be handled by others at lesser cost.

Economy linked with efficiency

It is this aspect of the matter which is behind the cry for decentralization. It not only means greater popular participation. It also means much cheaper administration. On the face of it, it may not easily be realized, but economy and efficiency are very closely interlinked.

Efficiency means getting the best out of a unit. It also means avoidance of expenditure on unproductive work and that is the very essence of economy. Nothing constitutes a greater drain on the public purse than unproductive expenditure and it is this pitfall that has to be avoided. Thus we find that business houses have evolved a system of cost accounting, and this principle can be adopted in other fields, with due regard to local conditions, with advantage.

Linked with productive effort is the need for viewing schemes as a whole. Many schemes naturally present an integrated picture when originally conceived, but during the process of scrutiny and examination, their character completely changes so much that when it emerges in its final form, it has undergone a radical change whereby much of its original utility is lost. To take an example, some tubewells are put up primarily to grow a cash crop like sugarcane. This arrangement for production of the raw material is made on the presumption that a sugar factory will be put up in the area. Now if the factory is not put up, then the utility of the tubewells will naturally be diminished.

Another feature of economy is avoidance of circumlocution which is the curse of many offices; and side by side with it goes the need for brevity and precision, which has always been considered a valuable asset for a civil servant. The latter enables issues to be sorted out and clear decisions taken on the points involved. It helps in communication of ideas and leads to economy both in terms of time and money.

Various mistakes

Waste, and its meaning need not be confined to the financial sphere alone, is a result of mistakes and, as is obvious, mistakes are of many kinds, mistakes committed in good faith and mistakes arising out of malafide intentions. There are mistakes which are technical in charac-

ter, mistakes arising out of inattention to details and mistakes arising out of stupidity and lack of vision. Whilst the first two are often the subject of adverse criticism, the loss that arises from the third category is not also properly understood although in effect it may be most ruinous. Ability, of course, is an evasive quality and not easy to describe but roughly it may be put down as the capacity to strike and choose the right path when one comes to a difficult crossroad. Whether this quality is present or absent is, therefore, a matter of considerable importance.

Modern industrial problems are complex in character and their co-ordination is a difficult affair. Co-ordinated efforts of numerous people are involved in running a train smoothly. This is only presentation of the problem from a departmental angle. But nothing exists these days in isolation and a co-ordinated effort on a much bigger scale is necessary. Thus it is not enough merely to generate electricity. Plans have to be made for its utilization and this means building up an agricultural, industrial and domestic load, and in such cases it is not enough to presume that because the want is there it will naturally be fulfilled. Problems of import, foreign exchange, capital formation may come in the way and these have to be individually tackled and solved.

The problem of co-ordination

The problem of administrative co-ordination is not an easy one and this brings us to the rôle of the technician and the administrator and sometimes these two rôles are mentioned as if there is some inherent contradiction in them. There can be nothing further from the truth. Both have their respective rôles to play, because without detailed planning, sound in technical detail, and administrative co-ordination, in which bottlenecks are avoided, no achievement worth the name is possible. Of course, there is nothing to prevent a technical expert from doing an administrative job and naturally no rigid line in this connection can be laid down, but the point is what is the best manner for utilization of man-power. Actually the problem in many cases is not one related to theoretical principle, but of its application in practice and the headache really starts when one of the two start encroaching on another's domain. There is an old saying that good fences make good neighbour's and probably a clearer understanding of the respective rôles would lead to smoother working and better results.

If results have to be achieved, planning in many sectors is necessary and there has to be a reasonable blending of theory and practice, and this means for real knowledge, the field is as important, in fact more so, than the text-book. It is field work which enables one to understand the basic character of the problem. It may appear something of an overstatement but the fact remains that more important and worth while things have come out of fundamental research and field work than research laboratories though of course the latter has its own rôle to play.

There is another point in this connection that calls for comment. Human beings may at times act like machines with its sureness of

touch and precision of movement, but they are something more than that, and herein comes the question of morale. An old colonel was very fond of repeating to his men, "Do your duty and a little more, and it is the little more that counts." "The little more" represents the morale of civil servant and the latter is basically related to his output. It is no wonder that leaders like Montgomery have emphasized that high morale is linked up with good performance.

Pitfalls of power

There is another issue that calls for a passing reference. Whoever wields authority, wields power, and the latter has its own pitfalls, as has been mentioned by action in a famous dictum, "power corrupts and absolute power absolutely corrupts." Shakespeare also spoke in a similar vein when he referred to "the arrogance of office". How is this to be avoided?

The first answer is the emergence of proper standards of professional integrity, action taken dispassionately, in accordance with the highest concept of duty without thought of extraneous conditions which mar the judgement. The second is strengthening the institution of parliamentary democracy, with its system of checks and balances, which has been devised to ensure that freedom is not threatened from any quarter.

Parliamentary democracy is an elaborate institution and civil service is a part of that structure. Democracy is really a blending of expert knowledge and popular will and for its successful functioning it is necessary that both play their respective rôles just as it is necessary that both sides of the case should be discussed at length before the court, and a counsel would clearly be failing in his duty if he argued his side of the case with mental reservations. Likewise it is with a civil servant. Before decisions are taken his point of view must be clearly and vigorously put across and when a civil servant does so he is only performing the function for which he has been recruited, trained and gets his pay.

Lastly, it is important that the civil servant eschews politics and this really flows from what has been stated above, because these functions have to be discharged by an entirely different set of persons. That a civil servant must not become a politician is a maxim which has been repeated times out of number, and this is as true as would be its counterpart, though the latter is seldom repeated that a politician likewise should not lose his identity and character and obviously different perspective and try to act like a civil servant.

An Administrator of the 19th Century (Traill of Kumaon)

We live in an age of frequent official changes and transfers and consider it quite normal for a stream of instructions to go out from a well-knit centralized authority to various district functionaries. It is therefore difficult to conceive that at one time things were entirely different and everything revolved round the man on the spot, who was given a free run of the place. This was inevitable in a country of long distances and difficult communications, and concentration of authority in one person was the rule rather than the exception, though of course rarely did this go to the extent of giving the local officer not only the right to execute and implement schemes but also the right to initiate policies. The present case is a somewhat extreme case and deals with the story of an administrator, strong, masterful and dominating; who was left undisturbed at this charge for something like 20 years; whose word was law, and who left an ineffaceable impression of his personality, his likes and dislikes, his judgment, his discretion and even his whims, on the tract that he was called upon to govern. The man to whom this authority was given was G. W. Traill, Commissioner of Kumaon. He was a member of the Bengal Covenanted Civil Service. He came here as Assistant Commissioner and stayed on as Commissioner of the Kumaon Hills, remaining here for almost 20 years till he relinquished charge in 1835. The characteristics of the age and the man are evident from an amazing statement recorded by him. He was giving directions because he was not aware where certain regulations applied to his charge or not having not heard anything from the headquarters for the last six years.

When the Treaty of Sagauli was concluded in 1816, the British tried to restore the earlier balance of power which had been upset following the assumption of authority by the Gurkhas at Kathmandu. The princes who had been deprived of their land received it back again and this applied particularly to areas in the present State of Himachal Pradesh. Certain areas which had good climate were, however, retained for the establishment of military cantonments, and thus we see the beginnings of northern India hill stations stretching from Simla right up to Almora. One compact tract was taken over for direct administration and this was the Kumaon and the Garhwal hills, over which Traill was placed at the helm of affairs.

Of course, at that time there was no Naini Tal nor Ranikhet nor some of smaller hill stations which had latterly gained importance. Traill's account mentions only four important towns: Almora, Srinagar, Champawat and Joshimath.

Almora, of course, was the hub of affairs. It was here that Chand Rajas had shifted their capital when they moved from Champawat.

It was here that the crucial fighting took place around the hill of Kalimat which led to the defeat of the Gurkhas and their eventual withdrawal, and it was from Almora that Traill ran his hilly charge.

By and large not much is known about Kumaon hills. The earlier period is shrouded in obscurity and the only general picture that emerges is of small principalities at war with one another. Little however was known about the people, their lives and labour, their simple joys and sorrows and one misses here the work done by the historians and scribes who gathered round the court at Delhi and other places. Whatever record there was, that too perished. In the first place, there was no proper looking after of records which were left at Almora. Later on, other records which were brought over to Rudrapur were destroyed in a big fire which devastated the town. For the first detailed authentic account of Kumaon as well as for piecing together broken threads of history we are indebted to Traill and other early administrators.

Kumaon hills were cut off from the rest of the country. There were passes opening out in the north on the Tibetan plateau and there were ghats in the south leading to the plains below. If these ghats could be controlled then nothing could go out. Regulation was, therefore, easy and the topography of the area certainly made the law and order problem very simple. This was also helped by the prevalence of a standard of honesty which was unknown in the plains. Very appropriately has a writer observed that "crimes and acts of violence are rare amongst an unenlightened people. When such are neither enslaved nor oppressed, nor exposed to poverty and persecution they seldom commit crimes against society or individuals. They continue and harmless and well disposed towards each other till an intercourse with civilized men teaches them how to be discontented by suggesting pleasures of difficult attainment and awakening desires which cannot be fulfilled without injury to their fellow beings." Traill who knew these hills like the lines of his hand quite correctly came to the conclusion that this area would have to be run differently from other tracts and could manage with very little police. He has further recorded as follows: "The general absence of crime in this province renders this branch of administration (criminal justice) of minor importance."

The pattern of crime in the hill area was simple and it mostly revolved round crimes relating to property. Not that offences relating to morality were non-existent, but such matters were invariably settled out of court, and the only cases in which notice had seriously been taken was when the matter was complicated by the actual abduction of the woman. Under the earlier regime the practice had been different and somewhat drastic. According to this usage, the husband of the seduced woman was required to give notice to the administrator of his intention to take the life of what is now politely described as the co-respondent, and after this notice he was permitted to take vengeance without fear of penalty. This was, of course, nothing but pure and simple murder, and Traill had this rule repudiated.

From a report sent by the Commissioner it appears that slavery was not only common, but also hereditary in character. The slaves depended on their owners for food, lodging and clothing and marriage expenses.

The purchase or temporary engagement of persons for carrying on cultivation, as well as the purchase of women were common and such transactions were accompanied by a deed of sale. Claims for freedom and servitude were heard like other suits. This was naturally stopped.

Curiously enough, one of the compelling reasons for crimes of violence had their origin in sorcery and witchcraft. This was so because it was commonly believed that cases of unusual sickness or mortality was due to the influence of evil spirits. Suicide, it appears, was mostly common to women. In the case of men, it was very rare, except probably in cases of incurable diseases like leprosy.

Traill believed in keeping the strength of the police to the minimum. Apart from places like Almora and Srinagar and a small nucleus establishment at the ghats leading to the plains, there was no separate police establishment. Even the *kotwali* of Almora was abolished and in 1823 this work was transferred to the *peshkar* of the Huzoor tahsil. Actually it was the Revenue staff which looked after police functions also. Not that the number of *patwaris* was very large. Initially it was about 42, which meant jurisdiction of roughly 300 square miles per *patwari*. But it was felt that he should be able to manage with the help of the *pradhan* and the *thokdar*. The *Pradhan* received no salary, but he was compensated by fees on marriages and by virtue of his office, he was given a small piece of land to cultivate. There was no hereditary claim as such, but generally the son succeeded the father. As a counter-check to the authority of the *Pradhan* was the *thokdar*. He likewise received a small fee at the time of marriage in the *Pradhan's* family. Likewise on a goat being killed, the *thokdar* received the gift of a leg. Both these functionaries were honorary and they did not cost anything to the State. The *patwari* also drew his salary as a revenue official and for discharge of these multifarious duties he was given a pay of Rs. 5/- p. m.

The Commissioner did not believe in utilizing chowkidars for police work and it is curious to note that some of the early administrators held rather strange views about their utility. In a later report, Batten said that the number of chowkidars in Pilibhit was unusually large and they were therefore a curse to the local population and "they descend on villages demanding milk, fowls, eggs for themselves. The inhabitants do not require these men for protection." About this very Tarai area Boulderson in a settlement report, reported rather bitterly as follows:

"The whole country cries out against the oppression of the police."

"In these Parganas the power of the police is dreadful and unchecked."

"The police is more dreadful than the robbers."

A more adverse view was hardly possible.

It has always been felt that justice should be cheap and swift. Whatever may have been the merit or demerit of the system that was introduced in the time of Traill, there can be no denying the fact that these objectives were achieved although the procedure adopted may have been somewhat questionable. Traill laid down that for civil cases the original plaint should be written on an eight anna stamp. For the

same amount, a copy of the judgment was to be made available. Thus justice could be had for a rupee.

In three-fourths of the cases, settlement invariably took place out of court. In other cases, after notices had been served the parties were examined, after which both sides were asked to produce witnesses. The witnesses spoke out plainly and bluntly and there was a large measure of common agreement in their statements. The standard of probity was so high, that it was only in very rare cases that the oath was administered. A man's word was good enough. In the background, lawyers were considered unnecessary and Traill did not allow vakils to appear. It was estimated that from the date of issue of summons not more than 12 days were required for decision of cases. Sometimes the proceedings were completed in even shorter time.

The offences which generally came up for trial were murder, theft, forgery and perjury, adultery, petty thefts, receiving of stolen property, assaults, defamation, petty misdemeanour, etc. At one stage in two years it was estimated that only 65 people in all were sent to jail. The amount of fines levied rarely exceeded Rs. 200/-. For the more serious cases the fine was Rs. 50/- and in the more common cases it ranged between Rs. 5/- and Rs. 10/-. The period of imprisonment rarely exceeded two or three years, though there are cases in which Traill is known to have awarded a sentence of 7 years.

The Commissioner was really paid a good salary. Traill as Assistant Commissioner was paid Rs. 700/- p.m. In 1817, on being appointed as Commissioner, his salary was fixed at Rs. 1,500/- p.m. Subsequently, in 1823, this figure was raised to Rs. 2,500/- p.m.

Traill took over an area which had been stricken by war and revolution. He was therefore reluctant to introduce a settlement which would extend beyond three years, as he felt a little uncertain about the migratory habits of the inhabitants. The important thing to do was to make them settle down. This did not fit in with the ideas of the Board, who naturally were anxious for a long-term settlement. As long as Traill was there he had his way, but when his successor came the Board expected him to make the normal long-term settlement. When Batten was in Garhwal he recorded that he did not know how an area of 4,000 square miles was to be covered. There were no village maps, nor any reliable record of areas. Traill characteristically enough had done the settlement in less than a month walking on the road between Hardwar and Badrinath. But everyone does not have the physical energy, nor the prestige to carry through his point of view in spite of obstacles and difficulties.

Traill administered the area according to his set views, but this did not mean that he did not take the peoples' reaction into account. In fact, he was very sensitive to public reactions. Whenever any dispute arose between the hill areas and the plains, Traill most unreservedly sided with the hill dwellers, so much so that it was recorded about him that on such matters he fought "like a Joshi hailing from Almora."

Traill ruled this area for 20 years. But already the shadows of the outer world had started closing in. When Batten stepped into his shoes

there was pressure from outside for conforming to the normal pattern and his successor had to give in at many places. Ramsay tried to stage a partial come-back, but the functions of the State were now expanding. The need for services like education, medical facilities, etc. had arisen. A rail head had been built up at Kathgodam and this led to indiscriminate felling of trees, to remedy which Ramsay had to evolve a proper policy of forest conservation.

The old naturally gives place to the new and names like Traill, Batten and Ramsay retreat into the limbo of the past, but when the picture of this area comes up, it is difficult to forget the rôle played by the first civil administrator who single-handed carved-out an administrative structure in the hilly wilderness of the Kumaon hills.

A Magistrate Remembers

An assault on a civic guard had taken place and his grey uniform had been torn and the District Officer was obviously agitated. He kept twiddling his thumbs, his face showed signs of strain and in no uncertain terms he gave vent to his feelings. In a case like this, it was necessary to make an example. He glanced at the row of the officers who were sitting around the office table, discussing law and order problems, and then suddenly he espied the officer who would normally have tried the case. Of course, the magistrate concerned could not be prejudiced and he was asked to leave the room for a while. He was sent out and called in and this happened three or four times, but during this process of flitting to and fro, he could not have been oblivious of the fact that what was required by the irate District Magistrate was a sentence of whipping. Fortunately, the magistrate had better sense and did not allow himself to be browbeaten, but the incident in many ways was typical of the period.

The above and other incidents mentioned below, happened during my first posting, twenty years ago, not a propitious period for one to go out of the portals of the university, to an outside world torn with conflicting loyalties, strife and tension, but it is not on this aspect of the matter that I propose to dwell. It is rather on the lighter side, the little anecdotes and minor happenings on which I would like to linger, because they in a way constitute the spice of life, and unimportant as they may be, they have undoubtedly their own place, otherwise they would not come up to the mind after lapse of so much time.

The administrative structure in those days revolved round the District Officer and therefore naturally he figured more in the current stories than others. There is the story of an officer, who had an obsessing passion for collection of government dues. One day on his tour, he found a zemindar going out in state on an elephant. He enquired whether his dues had been paid and was horrified to get an answer in the negative. Then in that case he had no business to be going about on an elephant. The poor man was dismounted from his elephant and made to walk back to his house. The next day, the dues in question were cleared.

There is a story of another officer and his light exchange with accounting objections. He was once asked why the grass in the Collectorate compound had not been auctioned and what had happened to it? He just wrote back to say that God's goats had come and eaten it up. At another time, the attack was more personal and the mileage distance given in the T. A. bill was disputed. The reply to this was quick and prompt and along with it some weighty documentary evidence was sent, which was nothing else than the P. W. D. milestone carrying the mileage figures very clearly and boldly. Incidentally, the freight was to be paid by the recipient.

But I am digressing. To revert to my district, during the period of my stay there I ran across all kinds of magistrates. There was a senior

officer, who had obviously been passed over and who just could not be brought round to make up his mind. He would hear the arguments, patiently and at length, but could not bring himself round to taking the crucial decision. Every Sunday, particularly I remember, he would sit up with his bundle, which at the end of the day's labour, more or less remained unchanged. Sometimes, I was given to understand, there was so much passage of time that the arguments had to be repeated over again, unofficially of course.

There was another magistrate who was always discovering some conspiracy or the other for the overthrow of the Raj. I was given to understand that he had tried this approach in a number of districts and it had worked well and he had been able to back in official favours without doing much work. For a time, he got on very well but then the District Officer, a shrewd man, came to know about his worth. It was further suspected that his touring was *furze* and while his tents moved from place to place, the officer stayed on conveniently at his headquarters. He was therefore served with an order to remain on tour and not return to the headquarters without permission. Apparently he complied with this order, but it was said that a bearded man (incidentally the magistrate was clean-shaven) who was often found on the bus to the city was no other than the venerable magistrate. I cannot say how far the story is correct, but the magistrate in question had a pet theory that to be effective a magistrate should be able to move about incognito, and for this purpose it was necessary that he should have this requisite wherewithal.

There was another magistrate who was very fond of carrying tales. We discovered this useful part of his character only when he left the district and when another police officer, who was sounded for carrying on this work, declined this honour and communicated this development very secretly to us. Magistracy in those days, was considered the high water-mark of respectability and I remember the case of an aspirant to an honorary magistracy who did not have requisite educational qualifications to be vested with the requisite powers. He, however, became an air raid warden and during rehearsals carried out his duties with much commendable promptness. The District Officer was obviously pleased. So one day he thought he may as well cash on and put forward the mild request that he be made a life air warden in the same manner in which honorary life magistrates were created. The poor Englishman, looking eagerly forward to the early termination of hostilities, was completely taken aback and found himself speechless.

There were of course the usual class from which title holders in those days were drawn, and two cases really stand out. There was a zamindar, a thrifty and frugal manager, who would not allow any tenant to put up a *pucca* construction in his village. I understand that later on he fared very badly and finally went away to Pakistan, where he died. There was the case of another man, whose passion was to stock grain and regulate issues therefrom almost as if it was a grain bank, on which lucrative interests were charged. He naturally did very well for himself. He conformed to the conventional type and made it a point to be correctly dressed when he appeared before the district officer. A spare

churidar pyjama for the purpose was kept in hand and was slipped over his *dhoti* immediately he neared the Collector's residence. Once the ordeal was over, he was happy to slip it off again and regain his freedom.

Another interesting story of a case under Sec. 109 Cr. P. C. was told to me by an English District Officer. While he was trying one of these preventive cases, he just had a hunch to check up and find out whether order in connection with the destruction of the house-breaking implement which was always figuring in the recovery list, had been complied with. So at the time of deciding a case, he put his initials on the implement and sure enough, in a case from another *thana*, the implement made its appearance again.

There is yet another case that stands out. During the course of an inspection, delay in submission of a particular return was found out and naturally it was expected that the defaulting official would be pulled up. But I must confess I was not prepared for the order that was eventually recorded. It was just a single line cryptic order of dismissal. Of course an order like that could not stand up in appeal and the Commissioner in allowing the appeal passed certain strictures, but that did not appear to disturb the District Officer. In the initial round he had scored his point and the official had been taught a lesson.

I have no personal knowledge, but I was given to understand that the officer had to his credit similar performances elsewhere. A particular case was appearing again and again in the statement of old cases and that called for some caustic comments on the part of his superior officers. In disgust, one day an order was passed something to this effect. The case was an old one and pending for some time, though it was difficult to squarely apportion the blame. Any way as it was old and therefore it was dismissed. The case was naturally restored in appeal, but as a fresh case, and it no longer disfigured the periodical return which the officer had to submit.

Roads in those days were not so widespread as they are now and jeeps, pick-ups and other official vehicles were unknown, but still we managed to get along somehow and long rides for purposes of surprise inspections at *thanas* were not unknown. Suddenly this even tenor was broken. The war had been on for some time and reverses were being experienced at the hand of the Japanese and the chief reason for this was ascribed to absence of knowledge of jungle warfare. One fine day, vehicle after vehicle with people in olive green uniforms, moved into the city. A whole division had been stationed and they were to be trained in actual battle conditions and thus get their battle inoculation. No nonsense was to be tolerated and this fact was borne home to me when I went round the jail on a routine inspection. An officer had tried to evade the front and had tried to shoot his leg with a revolver. It was held by the court martial that pulling of the trigger was not an accident and he was awarded a long term.

The shackles of the outer world had started closing in. At the time when I joined service wheat was selling at seventeen seers for a rupee. In three years it came round to ten seers and the scarcity continued and soon I found myself moved on from this assignment to another, to cope with an entirely new class of work.

The Changing Role of the District Officer

The District Officer is generally the youngest officer in the district and he is often the highest paid too. Why has so much authority and prestige been conferred on him? Why is an attempt made to recruit for this work the best talent in the country through a very difficult competitive examination? Why is experience gained at this post considered so essential for reaching the higher reaches of the official hierarchy, whether it is at the State headquarters or the Centre? And this brings us to the next question: how has the changed character of work affected his place in the administrative structure?

The institution of the District Officer is not found in other lands. It is basically an organization to deal with large populations and large tracts and for this purpose when it was created all authority was vested in one person and he was made responsible not only for work in one department, but all government departments. He represented government at district level and not a leaf in the district could turn without his knowledge and approval. But today all this is in the process of transformation. The flag that flew at his residence has gone and so has much of his old authority. Many of his old functions have disappeared though new ones have been added in their place. He still has a full job on his hand, in fact it would be no exaggeration to say that he is over-worked. But what is exactly the nature of the work that he does at present? Can it be done by others? Is he doing a useful job? These are some of the questions that pose themselves.

The time honoured designation of the post is District Magistrate and Collector. He is thus the head of the criminal and the revenue administration. He does little magisterial work now but at one time important cases were on his file. He also formerly acted as an appellate court for second and third class magistrates. His control then over the subordinate magistrate was really effective.

Now of course his magisterial functions are restricted to certain sections of the Cr.P.C. relating to maintenance of law and order, and here also the point has been raised in certain quarters whether some of these powers cannot be given to the Superintendent of Police. For bigger towns the pattern suggested is that of the Commissioner of Police. So it is in U. K., and so also in Bombay and Calcutta. But it has to be remembered that even the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police takes his orders from the Home Secretary. This control is direct and not the kind of control that Government any way is expected to exercise over the affairs of the department. Then again, in U.K. there is no centralized police authority, and the boroughs and the counties run their own police force.

Our police organization being what it is, control at district level is inevitable, and a more suitable substitute than the District Magistrate has not yet been evolved, whereby a point of view wider in scope than

the mere police approach is injected in the system, and at the same time a factional and a partisan approach is avoided.

The position of the District Magistrate as the head of the criminal administration stands stabilized, though case work as such is likely to come more and more under the purview of the independent judicial wing. Even now, in the separation districts, I. P. C. and important cases are tried by judicial magistrates and the executive magistrates deal only with cases under the Cr. P. C. and local acts.

The next important function relates to revenue functions. Some time back almost all worthwhile cases had been transferred from revenue to civil courts but now there has again been a switch back. Another important work used to be in connection with the maintenance of correct records. But the procedure now stands very much simplified. There was a spurt of work, it is true, following the abolition of zamindari, but things have now settled down. Work in connection with the settlement of the claims of the ex-intermediaries is also over.

Collection of government dues continues to be another important function. In fact, the responsibility under this head has gone up, following the abolition of zamindari, but here also other trends are discernible. For example certain departments, particularly Govt. of India departments, are thinking of having their own agency for collection. Apart from this, the work is of a routine nature and any well organized unit should be in a position to deliver the goods. It is certainly not work which calls for initiative from the top.

During the last few years, the District Officer had become the spear-head for execution of planning schemes, but now the focus has changed and the Antaram Zila Parishad is now very much in the picture. He still has a useful job to do, but instead of execution of plans, he will now more or less perform the functions of an inspectorate, well versed in rules and official ways.

There was a time when the District Officer meant the District Magistrate, but now other departments are coming into the picture and with expansion, the tendency for each department is to have an officer at district level. This is an inevitable results of specialization, but the problem is whether these officers should be guided by District Officer, who is the officer on the spot or by the Head of the Department and his deputies and assistants and regional officers. Here also close adjustment between the two has been evolved.

What is the future of this office? There is no doubt that the old class of work has gone down but that has not disturbed the total quantum of work that he is called upon to handle, in fact it continues to show an upward trend. What is this due to? Is it an exemplification of Parkinson's law, of work expanding itself to fill the time and space available? Is the institution being maintained because it is a good training ground for officers, because there can be no denying the fact that district experience is extremely useful for future assignments?

The post in question has received onslaughts from many quarters, but it has withstood the attack, and this is due to a number of reasons.

Our administrative structure is in a state of growth and for a long time to come it will need a sturdy peg, which will take in the burden of new schemes and new projects without giving way. Then again there will always be work which no one is prepared to shoulder and it is most convenient to have a high ranking officer at district level to whom this work can be passed on. And this applies not only to State schemes, but to the Centre also. Thus it is difficult to conceive of the general elections being held without the resources of the district being mobilized to the full under the leadership of the district officer. Likewise this applies to other drives, which are launched from time to time, whether it is the *rabi* drive or the small savings campaign.

In a country like ours a high powered organization at district level is inevitable. There have to be advisory committees and *ad hoc* committees. Who is to act as a co-ordination for this work? Obviously there has to be a neutral agent for this work and willy nilly this work devolves on the District Officer.

The character of work that the District Officer is called upon to handle has changed. Much of old statutory authority has gone and it is now exercised elsewhere. Another type of work is now emerging at district level namely, that of the co-ordination which is difficult, taxing and exacting. But whether it requires the same amount of initiative, as formerly, is not very clear. Probably there are other places, other avenues where this trait is required in greater measure, and where the call is more pressing. But to cater to them should not mean ignoring the structure at the grass roots. Side by side, it has also to be remembered that there is a rock bottom to cutting down of statutory authority and power, and experiments beyond a point cannot be carried out without irreparably damaging the institution itself. The District Officer has still a long innings before him though, old wine certainly needs to be put in new bottles.

Administrator or Specialist ?

The non-technical administrator is often a subject of resentment and sarcasm and the so-called superior wisdom of an I. C. S. officer, who, it was claimed, could be fitted into any rôle, was often questioned. How could an I. C. S. officer be a successful Inspector-General of Police or a Chief Conservator of Forests ? And yet it is true that for quite some time the head of the police organization used to be a non-police man and, in some places, the forest organization was headed by a civilian. To a man in the street this position was not easily understandable. If a man fell ill, he called a doctor and if he wanted to acquire the 3 R's, he went to a teacher. Why were these homely patterns not adopted in larger spheres ? Would they not lead to better management ?

The expert often complains that if he was given a freer hand, he would show much better results and execute work with greater speed. This reaction actually gives the clue for the answer, because it presupposes that the head of a Government organization is entitled to run the department entirely as he pleases. This obviously represents an attempt to over-simplify. If the initial progress of a scheme is somewhat slow, it is because things in a democratic process take shape differently. This does not mean that in the long run the democratic process works at a disadvantage. The position is just the reverse and has been amply demonstrated in times of war. Democratic opinion takes some time to work up to a climax, while a totalitarian country is on a war footing right from the start, but a free country makes it up in the end by all-out mobilization because of the goodwill of the people, who live in it, who consider the war as their own and not as an imposition. This is of course a digression, but it explains the nature of the democratic process.

In a democracy, before a decision is reached so many points of view have to be taken into account. The appropriate psychological atmosphere has to be built up. The legislature has to assess the burden that is being placed on the public exchequer and ministers, who know the pulse of the people, have to lay down priorities and attend to other details. All these factors work in their own way before a scheme goes through. A civil servant is basically to assist a Minister in the performance of the above task. Who is in a better position to do it ? An administrator, who has been trained to take all these factors into account, or a technician, who considers the above details unnecessary and who would like to brush away these things with a mighty sweep.

Before a scheme goes through, it has more or less got to be sold to the people. They must be satisfied about its benefits and they must feel that it compensates them for the additional burden that will be imposed on them in the shape of taxation. Further, till such time as a decision is reached, there is no option except to wait. The regular gamut of procedure will have to be undergone and various checks will have to be

exercised at different stages, to ensure that full benefit for the money spent has been received. In fact, in a democratic set-up the standard of public accountability is difficult and exacting. This is different from the kind of responsibility that a Chairman of the Board of Directors, for example, is called upon to exercise. Here there is only a limited field to be considered. Standards of profits have to be maintained and that is enough to satisfy the shareholders who are not interested in other aspects of the matter. But public accountability is entirely a different matter. This fact was only borne home, some time back, on a senior member of Government in the Eisenhower administration who had been drafted from the ranks of big business.

Not only that. It is sometimes claimed that in technical departments the expert should be placed at the helm of affairs at the Secretariat level. But expert in which branch? Of course, all of them cannot find their place at the top without unnecessarily increasing staff. The other alternative would be to give the top place to the senior technical man, which means subordination of one branch to another. Will this be a better arrangement than subordination to a non-technical administrator? In fact, hostility of one technical man to another is often very marked and sometimes the roots go deep. In such a state of affairs, is smooth working possible? The answer is obviously in the negative.

Then there is the problem of co-ordination on personnel management. A head of a department is known to have spent an hour and a half each day sanctioning casual leave applications. This is the kind of perspective that an expert exercises sometimes. The normal administrative approach would have been to have delegated their authority to someone else. Then again, the technical expert has no grounding in matters like service rules, promotions, disciplinary proceedings, etc. and the bulk of the Head of a Department's time is, whether he likes it or not, taken up with this kind of work. It is obvious that a person who has previous experience of dealing with this class of work in one department is in a better position to cope with it elsewhere. A general used to say that one of the reasons why he got to the top was that he took care to see that he did not commit the same mistake twice. He did not claim that he was infallible and that he made no mistakes. All that he said was that on the basis of experience he saw to it that he did not fall into the same pitfall again. A person who deals with the same class of problems in different departments, therefore, stands a better chance of avoiding mistakes.

The above observations apply to the top rungs of the ladder. There are problems in the lower rungs of hierarchy also. When an economy is advanced, and has fully grown it is possible to have wholtime specialized personnel. In a developing economy this is, however, not possible. In the first place, the work load is not enough to have wholtime workers on a long-term basis and, therefore, people are recruited against temporary vacancies when they occur and discharged when they cease. If semi-experts are taken on for this class of work, it means that generally they cannot be taken on a long-tenure basis, and this means that the quality of recruitment will suffer as a result of this difficulty. If the functionaries of a few departments are combined, then some kind of cadre could be built up, from which persons concerned could be drawn

from time to time. This would incidentally ensure a better class of recruits. It would also provide for a working arrangement when somebody falls ill, takes leave or goes on deputation outside. It will also ensure a certain amount of continuity. Apart from this, in an undeveloped economy it is not possible to have a specialized worker everywhere and, therefore, as is well known, in the planning set-up, a large number of multi-purpose workers has been placed at various levels. This is particularly true of the lower levels.

It has also to be borne in mind, that sometimes there is a tendency to make an unnecessary fetish of specialization. The person who administers vaccination or inoculation is just a trained hand and has no moorings in the medical profession. A man who plants trees is not a forester. All that is necessary in his case is that the work should be organized under expert guidance. Then again, work in many technical branches is really not so technical in character as it appears. A Cane officer who has taken his B.Sc. in Agriculture may actually be administering co-operative laws and an Agriculture Officer's main job may be looking after seed stores where there is danger of tripping up on accounts. It is obvious that a good portion of this work is basically non-technical in character.

It is true that the normal trend is from a general worker to a specialist, but it takes some time before the position becomes operative. Till the stage is reached, there are bound to be a number of multi-purpose workers at all levels. Even after the final stage has been touched, the administrator is bound to be very much in the picture because he is able to do better liaison work and this position will more or less hold good unless the elected representative at the top himself becomes something of an expert. Then of course the complexion changes as it is to some extent in Russia, but actually we are not discussing structures of that type. In a democratic set-up the person at the top is bound to be a non-technical man and, in the circumstances, it will obviously be necessary to have a link between him and the expert. For a long time to come our requirements would be basically met by a non-technical administrator.

Rule by the People

Greece gave us the gift of democracy, but it was not parliamentary democracy as we understand it. The Greeks rather believed in direct democracy, in which the dividing line between the ruler and the ruled was faint; in which the people's voice was directly heard, not only at the time of elections, but also in the day to day administration. Important decisions were arrived at in public meetings, offices were elected, and general interchangeability therein was the rule. Greek citizenship was undoubtedly a very coveted honour.

What were the general conditions which made this possible. The population of city States was limited and the citizens were known to one another. (In almost similar circumstances, small compact co-operative societies in Denmark and the Low countries have functioned very successfully). The State had only restricted functions to perform. The level of intelligence and education was high. For work involving drudgery there were the captives of war, the active band of slaves, to whom the rights of citizenship were denied, and who acted as hewers of wood and drawers of water. Broadminded and enlightened as the Greeks undoubtedly were, they saw nothing morally wrong in a system, in which a sizable population was condemned to bondage and to whom the good life was denied.

Citizenship at that time was something vital, active and real and as compared to it, the modern corresponding rights appear to be dull, drab and colourless. This of course is inevitable because when the basic conditions have changed how can the old picture continue? The State has expanded in size, the population has gone up, the functions of the State have multiplied, science and technology have extended their frontiers, and we need more specialists, more experts, more trained administrators every day. In the altered circumstances, how can the old simple structure prevail? But the mind of man, his basic instincts and impulses do not register a change so easily, and in spite of knowledge of modern conditions and the complexity of problems that we have to face, we cannot uproot from our hearts, the desire for intimate association in management of the affairs of State and we feel the need for creating a tie which is real and personal, rather than impersonal and abstract.

Thus the mind travels back and tries to relive and re-enact the drama of a past era, half wishfully hoping to revive it, even when reason suggests that the same is ruled out now for obvious practical reasons. At the same time, because the desire is there, the gap has somehow to be bridged, and this entails certain adjustments and concessions to public opinion.

How this is done in a modern democratic set-up, helped by science and technology is an interesting subject for study. When one step after another was taken in quick succession, there may have been

no clear overall picture in view, except probably the need for getting over the difficulty of the moment, but these developments in retrospect appear to conform to a pattern, based on the need for closer public participation and co-operation.

How has this been done? In the first place it has been brought about by greater delegation of authority at various levels. Thus to make the plan a people's plan, there has been considerable delegation of authority at the village level and block level and the question of further delegation is being considered.

Then again scientific inventions and discoveries, have made contact between the government and the people a living reality. The microphone enables the human voice to be carried to lakhs of listeners that throng below the speaker's dias. The cinema, the radio, and now the televisions make this personal contact possible, which at one time no one could dream of.

The press in this connection needs separate mention because it has its own place. Not only does it record day to day happenings, but it does something more. To important trends and events, it gives its own interpretations; analysing, sifting, dissecting and reading in between the lines. Not only are events reported, but the line for future thinking is also indicated and thus it acts as a powerful factor in moulding public opinion, because any view dinned in season and out of season, cannot but affect the human mind and the thinking on the subject. "Tell me what company you keep and I will tell you who you are," is an old saying. Can it not likewise be said that a person's reactions can be gauged from the newspaper that he reads? The Fourth Estate is undoubtedly a powerful factor.

Another outcome resulting from the above is the sudden emergence of committees, not only statutory committees, but advisory committees, consisting of laymen and non-technical experts, who view the problem from a general angle, shorn of technical jargon and intricate details. In fact, if trends are examined, it will be observed that such committees are fast multiplying and gathering greater prestige and authority.

Last but not least is the enlargement of the sphere of public relations, which is something much more than merely courtesy in public dealings and giving of appropriate information at various levels. It represents an attempt to understand human nature, to find out the other man's point of view, accommodate it as far as possible, and in event of refusal to tone it down, so as to make the latter more palatable and less offensive. This represents a change of approach and more important than what appears on the surface is the spirit behind it. After all man is not made for mere enforcement of rules, rather it is the other way about. If rules or an administrative structure do not accept this position, it means they have become obsolete and should go.

So far we have examined only one side of the picture, namely, the parts relating to rights, and this includes the right of direct participation in management, a desire which has been kept alive in human hearts, ever since the spirit of freedom was born; and is as old as the

institution of democracy itself. But, as has been mentioned earlier, this is not always possible or feasible, though it is true that the gulf between the ruler and the ruled has been bridged to some extent and will probably be reduced further still. Yet this does not mean that we can revert to direct democracy of Periclean Athens. A brake on our expectations is clearly necessary. Side by side with rights come duties, and this means restraint and the need for understanding the other side of the picture.

Whenever people in large numbers get together a certain amount of regulation and control is inevitable and necessary. If there is vehicular traffic, there is bound to be traffic police, whose directions have to be carried out by everyone, high or low. This position is understood by everybody and nobody disputes the right of the policeman to regulate the movement of the swankiest of cars and its occupant. Likewise if there is a meeting, it is customary to have a chairman to conduct its proceedings and the directions given by him have to be obeyed by all. The right to regulate is a necessary corollary of every ordered society.

The next question that arises is to whom should this regulation be entrusted? This depends on what type of regulation is required, whether its character is simple or intricate and does it need the services of an individual or an organization? What is the type of work that is entrusted to it? Is it in the realm of policy making or execution? Does it deal with maintenance or is it a fresh project?

The answer to the above will furnish the type of machinery that is required for its execution. It will determine its requirements on a short-term and a long-term basis and this gives rise to a hierarchy and organized structure, in which large number of individuals are involved, in which duties are fixed and determined beforehand, in which the requirements of administrative, managerial and other cadres are carefully planned. How should the individual be recruited? What should be his training? What is the experience that he should be made to undergo?

The success of any scheme depends on the machinery that has been forged for its implementation, and the machinery does not mean only the official machinery comprising civil servants of all ranks, but non-official functionaries also, who have their own vital rôle to play. How sound is this machinery and its parts? Has it been properly toned up for this great task? Has it initiative and freshness of approach? Has it got the requisite ingredients for leadership? Is it able to combine expert knowledge with popular will? And finally, is the approach of the community progressive and dynamic because that will determine the character of leadership. Further it has to be borne in mind that leadership is thrown up by the community, not imposed from without. It is part and parcel of the community and cannot be considered apart from it. It has the greatness which the community gives it and also the limitations which it imposes on it.

This limiting factor has to be kept in mind throughout. There is no doubt that science has brought parliamentary democracy closer to the average hearth and home than ever before, but it also has its

limitations in the sense that the hand administering the scheme has its own shortcomings and limitations, which can be traced back to various causes, for example, lack of proper schooling, inadequate attention to character building and absence of proper traditions, etc. No doubt, improvements are necessary and are being brought about, but they cannot be given effect to overnight; particularly in cases where long-range planning is necessary. As has been aptly said, it takes less time to instal a machine than train up an engineer.

Good administration is a kind of salesmanship, and the abler the man at the counter, the easier it is to establish identity of interest with the buyer. It is not for nothing that diplomats representing their countries abroad are expected to be people with shrewd intellects and great suavity of manners. There is no doubt that it would be a great gain if at some of the lower rungs of the ladders, this polish could be imported. But the difficulty is that such plants have to be grown and cultured. They cannot come straight away from the assembly line in the factory.

There is another point that calls for a little examination. Public relations are important, as they provide the sugar coating to a pill which might otherwise have been somewhat bitter, but ultimately it is the ingredient of the pill which cures the patient. Whilst the salesman's rôle is important, it is also necessary to ensure, that the produce measures up to the requisite standard.

Whether a produce is good or bad depends on many factors. It involves some planning and sound execution. It presupposes clear cut division of functions and responsibilities at the time of production and it envisages that everyone has put his shoulder to the wheel and done his best. This entails careful watching and supervision and probably at times also a certain amount of ruthlessness. It is a difficult grinding process and a wholtime job, and more often than not an expert's job, whose results are there for all to see. There should, therefore, be no deterioration in standards. This is an obvious axiom which is accepted by all concerned. But do we always create conditions for proper emergence and maintenance of these standards?

As is well known, every vehicle can only carry up to a certain load. Beyond that the performance is affected and the engine and the machine stands in serious danger of being damaged. That is why we have motor rules. On the same analogy we have devised safety rules in other spheres, whose enforcement is entrusted to an independent authority. Do similar conditions not apply to the administrative machinery also?

The functions which a modern State has to undertake are large and varied, and this brings in its wake a certain amount of specialization, which has the effect to a certain extent of shutting off a large number of activities from the public view. This position has been remedied to some extent by assistance provided in this matter by science. But this also has its own limitations. When the salesman and the producer happen to be the same person, the former must not do anything that will tell on the quality of the produce.

It is said that history repeats itself. But the patterns which emerge at a later date although apparently similar, are never the same. Time brings in its own changes, alterations and modifications. So it has been with direct democracy. It might have been practised at one time, but it is no longer a practical proposition now. Thus the human mind is groping towards a new pattern and a new synthesis. This is a consummation devoutly to be wished, but in trying to reach new heights we should take care to see that we do not fall in between two stools.

On Committees

Public opinion on the subject of committees is likely to fluctuate between two extremes. There are people who have complete faith in it and who consider it as a panacea for all ills. There are others who consider it a waste of time and energy and feel that the best way to put an issue in cold storage is to refer it to a committee. Actually this is taking an uncharitable viewpoint. It is possible that the entire recommendations of a committee may not receive approval of government; in fact the specialist is always inclined to over emphasize, but by and large, the large bulk of recommendations are invariably accepted. This is particularly true if the enquiring body happens to be a commission, which enjoys a much higher status than an ordinary committee. But actually it is not committees of this type that are the subject matter of this article. Rather what we have in mind are advisory committees, which have been constituted at all levels, from the top to the bottom. These committees are a recent growth, and have been set up so that the popular point is closely associated in all decisions arrived at, decision which have a major bearing on the lives of people, whether they live in towns or cities or villages and the countryside. Do these committees perform a useful job? Do we get full return for the time, energy and money spent on them? Are we getting the maximum return from the varied experience of the members, who are drawn from all walks of life? These are some of the questions that pose themselves.

Let us take a look at the proceedings of a typical committee. The Chairman welcomes the members and they in turn question the shortness of the notice and the inadequacy of the material supplied, which too has been distributed at the eleventh hour. The meeting is probably taking place in the forenoon, but the members are undeterred by the fact that the discussion at best could be carried on only for a few hours, provided of course the committee meets again in the afternoon. And then, suddenly one of the items on the agenda gives the cue for the debate. Additional funds, not of a very high order, have been asked for a particular item, and the discussion turns on the need and value of the institution itself. Members are interested in finding out how much money had been spent on it and what are the returns? All very cogent questions undoubtedly, and excellent subjects for enquiry, if only there was a little more time. But in the limited time allotted what could be done? The enquiry would still have been fruitful, if the intention was really to pull the institution to pieces and unmask some serious failing. But subsequent events showed that nothing of the kind happened. The heat after a time blows off, and this is followed by the usual questions. How is it that the local official was never seen? Some of the members yawn. They are not interested in what is happening in a particular district, and almost without knowing, the hours run out and every one is regaled to tea and light refreshments, but some of the members, their spirits undampened, manage to keep up their voices which the

cluttering of plates and saucers cannot completely drown. And soon in very pleasant humour every one disperses. But does everyone like the abrupt note in which these committees end? Does it not at times leave a sense of emptiness?

At this stage, it would probably be appropriate to look into the historical background because a man's action and behaviour is conditioned by the collective sub-consciousness of the past. What is the past as far as democratic institutions and traditions in our country are concerned? Have we handled problems democratically in the past and if so what has been their magnitude? Here at the outset we must begin with two limiting factors. Democratic institutions, here as elsewhere, were not very much in vogue. In the second place, the functions performed by the central authority were limited to the bare minimum, otherwise local democracy was supreme whether it was in the form of town councils, panchayats or the caste system, which initially it has to admit was also democratically conceived, and the problems therefore which they were called upon to handle were local, parochial and of limited interest, though important in their own way. But the canvas was limited and the general perspective was missing. Tribal instincts and impulses may be all right in local surroundings but when the same state of mind is called to bear on larger problems, which more often than not embrace larger interests then something is found wanting. Interest clashes against interest, and the functioning of the larger unit is jeopardized. It is bad enough that cases of individuals and officers be raised at such meetings, and they often are. It is much worse when such references have their origin in caste feelings. Committees in the modern context leave no room for play of tribal instincts of this type. The consideration of a problem from the narrow angle of caste or religion does not encourage its solution, in fact it leads to clogging of progress.

Apart from this there is another aspect of the matter. One of our drawbacks at present happens to be that we have not much experience of handling big institutions democratically. Not that we have not had republics. There was Vriji State or the Vajjan confederacy (North Bihar) and the State of Maua (Gorakhpur), which were run on the democratic principles, but then their size was limited. Whenever we look back and think in terms of bigger administered areas, what really emerges is the picture of rulers and kings. After all, India reached its high water-mark under Emperor Ashoka when the whole of India was united under a strong executive authority.

This is not to suggest that the people's point of view was neglected. In fact, Buddhism never concealed its democratic elements and referred to the caste system and the supremacy of the Brahmins in derisive terms. Apart from this there was a tradition of easy accessibility and in this connection it will be as well to recall Asoka's Rock Edicts "I am ready to do the people's business independently—I have commanded that immediate report must be made to me at any hour and in any place, because I never feel full satisfaction in my efforts and despatch of business. For, the welfare of all folk is what I must work for." And this is as much as could be claimed by a popular administration anywhere.

But as will be observed, the above represents a tendency to run up to someone for a solution, and not to grapple with the problem one self, unless it is of local interest. There were other features also of which note has to be taken. In the parishads, discussions had to be unanimous or otherwise reference to impartial arbitration was necessary. In the Buddhist organization also, the position was more or less similar. The organization was run through general meetings with elaborate standing orders and proceedings. Decisions, however, had to be made by unanimous consent, not by majority. When, therefore, unanimity was not achieved, the problem was referred to a committee of wise men.

During the period of British rule also, experience of democratic institutions was limited to Municipal Boards and District Boards, whose powers were severely circumscribed and limited to problems of local interest. It was easy to see whether street lights, or a "kharanja" in a particular mohalla would serve any useful purpose. Likewise in establishment matters, the sanitary inspector or the primary teacher was a known person, his weakness, his foibles, his performance could be read like an open book. For bigger issues, as was obvious, authority rested elsewhere, and for seeing that the resolutions were in order, the Commissioner was given the power of veto. Again, there were drastic powers like surcharge from members in case of irregular and improper sanctions. Experience of local bodies was basically a limited experience.

The problem at present is a problem of growth, change and metamorphosis and not only that but a change in values, and this means in many cases attachment to secular instead of non-secular ideas and substitution of intellect in place of irrational prejudice. The point of pivotal interest is whether the interest and attachment of members is built up of local interests, or has a broader basis for appeal. Here of course we cannot be completely guided by history or the past, because the problems that we are called upon to cope have not arisen before, yet at the same time it is necessary that we should be aware and conscious of the pitfalls that lie in our path.

In a committee, the talk is between equals and views and ideas are exchanged, not inflicted. Here there is no pedestal from which one projects his image. There is a healthy give and take, a pooling of impressions and ideas and an attempt to evolve a solution, which is by and large generally acceptable to all, and if this is not so, at least to the majority. But such decisions, by their very nature cannot be unanimous in character, because it is just not possible to reconcile all conflicting points of view although it is true that a proposal in course of debating and discussing sometimes undergoes a radical change, which bears little resemblance to its original character, and this is as it should be, because growth and change is an inevitable corollary of full discussion. But this of course does not mean that the few should be able to hold up the decisions of the many. The *librun veto*, the solitary right to throw out a measure is the very negation of the spirit indicated above.

A committee by its very nature confines itself to a small sector and a small segment, it includes a minor facet and leaves out many things,

not because they are unimportant, but because they have to be considered elsewhere, by other people. Committee work implies division of work and division of labour, and therefore there must be no encroachment, no duplication of work, no overlapping. It means in many cases a self-imposed restriction, a self-denial; it calls for restraint when there is any obvious itching to unload one's self. But prolixity and irrelevance can only be at someone else's cost, because the limiting factor in this case is time, which can either be usefully employed or wasted. Dilating on individual cases, unless it be by way of illustration of a general principle, can only mean, that the level of useful discussion is cut down, and the deliberations become rambling and discursive, instead of being pointed and incisive. It is just not possible to have a general discussion in which broad principles are discussed side by side with specific issues which have no general bearing on the larger issue.

The courts have got round this difficulty by first framing issues, then calling evidence bearing on it, and finally giving definite findings on each issue, framed and posed. If this procedure was not adopted, then the whole matter would go on endlessly without any final picture emerging. But here it may be pointed out that the contending parties in a court of law are lawyers who have specially been trained that way. Precisely. But in many ways the qualities required in committees and courts of law have a lot in common and this explains why a large number of eminent parliamentarians are people with legal experience and background.

The committee is a difficult and delicate apparatus to handle and it requires a particular type of temperament, aptitude and ability. A person should be powerful enough to shape the opinion of others and yet responsive enough to welcome fresh ideas from others, even people who are not of the same intellectual plane, because democracy is a process of evolution, not of thrusting of ideas and it believes in the good old adage that the wearer alone knows where the shoe pinches. Thus, everyone should equally be given a chance to put up his point of view.

It is of course inevitable that some should overshadow others, but this does not mean that the minority viewpoint should not be heard. Likewise the proceedings should not be tinged with intolerance. The temptation to root out heresy and false beliefs is an old one, but rarely has witch hunting delivered the goods. By a strange trick of fate, the mind of the hunter and the hunted runs on a common track, the one trying to pursue and the other trying to evade; but basically while the chase is on, both must think of the same things, and people who are obsessed with any kind of enforcement, even if it is in the name of liberty and freedom, ends up by destroying it. Macarythism is not a trait to be envied. Loyalty to one's immediate environment is an admirable thing, but it can be carried too far.

Mention has already been made of the trained intellect in this connection, but more important than this is uninhibited approach, which tries a problem independently on its own merit and not on restricted likes and dislikes and narrow loyalties. This is of course easier

said than done, because this approach is not built or unbuilt in a day. Old prejudices cannot be cast off like an old set of clothes, but it is as well to begin with a recognition of the problem, and try to visualize what the effect of this cancerous growth is going to be on our body politic and our social structure.

It is sometimes urged that there should be more powerful committees here on the American model. This however misses one important point. In the U. S. A the executive authority is vested in the President and therefore this need of circumscribing his authority by powerful committees. In a parliamentary form of government, the position is different. Here the authority already vests in a committee, responsible both individually and collectively, namely the Cabinet, which is the top committee that rules the land, and in a Cabinet in many ways the best traditions of democracy are embodied; strength that comes through collective unity and popular appeal that is a result of taking into account different points of view.

In a committee what is of paramount importance is the psychological approach, a reasonableness and a persuasiveness and therefore what is required is conversational rather than platform ability. Yet in many ways these qualities are not easily acquired, particularly as they are built up after years of grooming and training, in which necessary finishing touches have been given by the human and tolerant approach. And yet in many ways this is the crux of the problem. Modern services in a State require organization on a big scale and it is obviously not possible to administer every thing directly and the indirect method has, therefore, to be evolved, that is, administration through committees. In fact, if democracy is to survive in a big way, no other alternative is possible. If democracy is therefore to be a living entity, it is up to us to prove that we can measure up to the requisite stature, and shed small weaknesses and foibles and develop wider sympathies and interests.

